

# CHILDREN AND THEIR REACTION TO REUNION

## HOW WILL MY CHILDREN ACT WHEN THEIR SERVICE MEMBER PARENT RETURNS?

Many parents worry about their children's reaction during deployment reunion. Parents dream of their children shouting "daddy! daddy!" or "mommy! mommy!" while running off a ship or plane into their arms. But many times, the dream doesn't happen. Some kids feel worry, fear, guilt, happiness, excitement, and anger when their separated parent finally returns. If you imagine a "perfect" reunion for your child, you may be disappointed. So be aware of this and talk to your children.

**Separation from a parent is stressful for a child. Your children may have acted out this stress during the early part of the deployment by behaving in ways you found difficult or worrisome (such as aggressive behavior, eating or sleeping problems, or a drop in grades). Behavior should have returned to normal 8 to 10 weeks into the deployment. By then family life should have calmed as children adapted to the deployed parent's absence.**

When a parent returns to the family, all the members will have to adjust to new interactions. This adaptation or change can be very stressful for a family, especially for the children. Families are always changing, and how parents and children interact with one another should change as the members grow. When dad or mom comes home, everyone will have changed physically, emotionally, and socially.



## Children's Reaction to Soldier's Return

<b>Reactions</b>	<b>Techniques</b>
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### Birth to 1 Year

Cries	Hold
Fusses	Hug
Pulls away from you	Bathe and change
Clings to spouse or caregiver	Feed and play
Has problems with urination/defecation	Relax
Changes their sleeping and eating habits	Relax, hug, and hold
Does not recognize you	Relax, hug, and hold

### 1 to 3 Years

Shyness	Don't force holding, hugging, kissing
Clinging	Give them space
Does not recognize you	Give them time to warm up
Cries	Be gentle and fun
Has temper tantrums	Sit at their level
Regresses – no longer toilet trained	Be gentle and fun, don't force

### 3 to 5 Years

Demonstrates anger	Listen to them
Acts out to get your attention; needs proof you're real	Accept their feelings
Is demanding	Play with them
Feels guilty for making parent go away	Reinforce that you love them
Talks a lot to bring you up to date	Find out the new things on TV, at preschool, in books

### 5 to 12 Years

Don't feel they're "good" enough	Review pictures, school work, activities, scrapbooks
Dreads your return because of discipline	Praise what they have done
Boasts about Army and parent	Try not to criticize

### 13 to 18 Years

Is excited	Share what has happened to you
Feels guilty because they don't live up to standards	Listen with undivided attention
Is concerned about rules and responsibilities	Don't be judgmental
Feels he/she is too old now to change plans to accommodate parent	Don't tease about fashion, music
Is rebellious	Respect privacy and friends

Your family relationships should become normal again within a few months. However, if you had problems before you left, those problems may still be there when you get back. If the problems persist and you continue having difficulty adjusting after a few months, seek help through one of the following offices:

- **Family Advocacy Program      706-545-4013**
- **Chaplain's Family Life Center      706-545-1760**
- **Social Work Service      706-545-1661**
- **Community Service Agencies – see your local phone book (such as Mental Health Department, Social Services Department)**